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whom he has served. But invariably he comes back to earth again as he finishes with a melancholy shake of his grizzled head, and a survey of his corpulence, saying, "Quando giovane, era tanto, tanto bello, ma, non c'e piu." (In my youth I was very beautiful, but it is all over now.) And then, with a pull or two from the pipe, he nods blissfully in his corner until some complaining student requires him to shout "Sta ferma!" (Hold still!) to the wearied model.

DWIGHT BENTON.

#### THE DEGRADATION OF ART.

"THERE lies before me," says an acute writer in a recent English periodical, "an old Persian rug, all out of shape and twisted in the weaving, but full of subtle quantities in color, perfect in the proportions of its vivid brilliancy, and a grand new Axminster carpet alongside, of faultless construction, with a design as hideous as its colors are harsh.

It is not only so with productions destined for the English market, but the degradation of art is beginning to spread all over the world—the standards of 'instructed' European taste are vitiating the very well-springs of beautiful old work. The 'mantilla' of the Seville and the 'tovaglia' of the Roman peasant are supplanted by frightful bonnets; the striking old costumes are disappearing alike in Brittany and in Algiers; in Athens and in Turkey they are giving way to the abominations of Parisian toilettes for the women, while the chimney-pot hat is taking the place of the turban and the kalpac for the men.

What may be the reason why architecture, sculpture, painting, and even poetry—the combination of stone, brick, marble, metal, colors, and, lastly, of metrical forms of words—should all suffer by the advance of our (so-called) civilization and education, is still a mystery; but few will be found to doubt the fact in detail, though they may deny the general formula.

Perhaps our self-consciousness as to our great virtues, our 'progress,' our knowledge, the learning of the reason of our work, the introversion of our present modes of thought, check the development of an idea, even if we may be fortunate enough to get hold of one. Self-consciousness is fatal to art; there is a certain spontaneity of utterance—singing, as the birds sing, because they cannot help it—'composing' almost as the mountains and clouds 'compose,' by reason of their existence itself, not because they want to make a picture—which produces natural work grown out of the man, and the requirements of his nature, to which it seems, with very rare exceptions, that we cannot now attain.

In sculpture, a modern artist has acquired ten times as much anatomy as Phidias; dissection was unknown, and not permitted, by the Greeks. Chemistry has produced for the painter colors which Raphael (luckily for us) never dreamed of. Yet one cannot help wondering at the strange daring which permits the honorable society of Burlington House to hang yearly the works of the ancient masters of the craft on the same walls where their own productions are to figure a few weeks later, as if to inform the world most impressively and depressingly from how far we have fallen in pictorial art; to string up our taste, as it were, to concert pitch—to give the key-note of true excellence, in order to mark the depth to which we have sunk.

We now teach drawing diligently, and are surprised that we get no Michael Angelos. Did Masaccio go to a school of design, or Giotto learn 'free-hand' manipulation? Education, as it is generally defined—meaning thereby a knowledge of the accumulation of facts discovered by other people—is good for the general public, for ordinary humanity, but not for original minds, except so far as it saves them time and trouble by preventing them from reinventing what has already been done by others. True, there can be but few 'inventors' (in the old Italian sense of creators) in the world at any one moment, and training must, it will be said, be carried on for the use of the many; but one might still plead for a certain elasticity in our teaching, a margin left for free-will among the few who will ever be able to use it. And, meantime, it is allowable to lament over the number of arts we have lost, or are in danger of losing, which can only be practised by the few—whose number seems ever to be diminishing, under our generalizing processes of turning out as

many minds of the same pattern as if we wanted nail-heads or patent screws by the million.

This is not education in its true and highest sense—i.e., the bringing forth the best that is in man; not simply putting knowledge into him, but using the variety of gifts, which even the poorest in endowment possess, to the best possible end. And this seems more and more difficult, as the stereotyped pattern is more and more enforced in board schools, endowed schools, public schools, universities; and each bit of plastic material, while young, is forced as much as possible into the same shape, the only contention being who shall have the construction of the die which all alike are eager to apply to every individual of the nation.

Of all races which have yet existed there can be no doubt that the Greek was the one most highly endowed with artistic powers of all kinds; yet the Greek was certainly not, in our sense of the term, an educated man at all; his powers of every kind, however, were cultivated indirectly by the very atmosphere he lived in. His sensitive artistic nature found food in the forms and colors of the mountains and the islands, the sea and the sky, by which he was surrounded; by the human nature about him in its most perfect development; by every building—his temples, his tombs, his theatres—every pot and pan he used, every seat he sat upon; whereas no man's eye can be other than degraded by the unspeakable ugliness of an English manufacturing town, or, what is almost worse, by the sham art where decoration of any kind is invented or attempted by the richer middle class.

The theory that soil and climate and food produce instincts of beauty, as well as varieties of beasts and plants, is, however, evidently at fault in these questions; for if this were the case at one time in the world's history, why not at another? and the present inhabitants of Greece are as inapt as their neighbors in sculpture, painting, and architecture. Nothing, even out of the workshops of Birmingham, can exceed the ugliness of their present productions.

There seems now a headlong competition in every country after bad art. If we ask for lace and embroidery in the Greek islands, or silver filigree in Norway—if we inquire for wood-carving from Burma, or the old shawls and pottery from Persia and the East—the answer is always the same; we are told that there is 'none such made at present.' It is only what remains of the old hand-made work that is to be obtained; the present inhabitants 'care for none of these things.' Sham jewelry from the 'Palais Royal,' Manchester goods, stamped leather, and the like, are what the natives are seeking for themselves, while they get rid of 'all those ugly old things' to the first possible buyer for any price which they can fetch.

Manufacturing an article (whatever be the real derivation of the word, but) meaning the use of machinery for the multiplication of the greatest number of articles at the least cost, however admirable for the comfort of the million, is evidently fatal to art. When each bit of iron-work, every hinge, every lock scutcheon was hammered out with care and consideration by the individual blacksmith, even if he were but an indifferent performer, it bore the stamp of the thought of a man's mind directing his hand; now there is only the stamp of a machine running the metal into a mould. When every bit of decorative wood-work was 'all made out of the carver's brain'—when the embroidery of the holiday shirt of a boatman of "Chios' rocky isle" took half a lifetime to devise and stitch, and was intended to last for generations of wearers, art found a way, however humble, through nimble fingers interpreting the fancies of the individual brain. 'Fancy work,' as an old Hampshire woman called her stitching of the fronts and backs of the old-fashioned smock-frocks, each one differing from the 'one she made before, as her 'fancy' led, was always interesting, and almost always beautiful."

M. W., an esteemed contributor to THE ART AMATEUR, thinks that Mr. Rideing, in his article "Artists in San Francisco," in our February issue, was too severe in his strictures concerning the lack of artistic taste on the Pacific Coast. She explains that "the seeming incongruity of a frame-house with mosaic floors is owing to the moisture of the climate and the fear of earthquakes." "None of our large private residences," she adds, "are built of aught but wood." In regard to the remark concerning statuary in a house "which includes among its treasures a colossal and

almost nude figure of Architecture, with an extended arm, holding in the hand a platter upon which is a model of the establishment that contains it," M. W. explains that "the figure referred to is a fresco intended to represent 'Home,' being surrounded by mythical figures suggesting the pleasures of home life. In the same house, not another, there are to be, it is true, seven panels, four feet by ten, but as the place allotted to them is in an immense hall, and they are the work of Tavernier, they are not so 'bizarre' as the critic would have us believe. Young as our city is," continues M. W., "it is third on the list of American cities starting Art Schools, while many young and talented art strugglers, by the beneficence of some of our wealthy citizens, have been sent abroad to complete their studies. We also have the honor of claiming as a San Franciscan the only American artist who has ever sold a picture to the French Government, H. R. Bloomer's painting of the 'Bridge at Grez' having been so disposed of at the Paris Exhibition. Our resident artists mentioned as being good are about the only local ones who are patronized, or who have any reputation; and surely no man is so blind to his own interests as to remain in a place where (according to W. H. R.) there is so much to hamper him, and no success to crown his work."

"THE Flagellation of Christ," said to be a Murillo, and valued at \$100,000, is in the hands of the sheriff in San Francisco, subject to various claims against the owner amounting to \$7490. It was brought to this country from Paris, in 1876, by the Countess de Pruschoff, at the advice of an aged artist named Schaeft, who assured her that much money could be made by exhibiting it here. It was shown in New York, but not publicly exhibited, we believe; and then it was carried to San Francisco, where it was confidently hoped that it would be eagerly snapped up by one of the bonanza kings. No bonanza king wanted it, however; and finally Mr. Schaeft and a somewhat numerous suite who had kept up with the lady and the picture in all their travels, and who had accommodated the Countess with occasional loans pending the sale of the picture, attached it to satisfy their claims, which, it appears, includes special items for "services rendered." The Countess declares that nothing is due to them by reason of any services rendered, but, on the contrary, their seeming connection and manifest devotion to "The Flagellation" were a direct injury to her, and not solicited by her. As soon as the litigation is ended, the picture, if not disposed of in San Francisco, is to be sent to New York for sale.

PROBABLY before this ink is dry the bill before Congress removing the import duty on art antiquities will have become a law. But let not the bric-à-brac dealers make haste to be glad. It is not for them. "Old Masters," rare china, antique furniture, and the rest are not included in the provisions of the act; nor indeed is any object of art of even so remote a period as the Middle Ages. The measure is only intended to cover the importation of the works of the ancients. This is not much, but it is better than nothing. It will have been accomplished mainly through the indefatigable personal exertions of a few gentlemen whose business interests, as well as the interests of art education in general, have suffered by the existing restrictions. What they have done may be done again by dealers in more modern, but for educational purposes hardly less valuable works of art.

#### PICTURE CLEANING AND RESTORING.

THOUGH this work is both dirty and laborious, it requires a large amount of artistic appreciation, and to the real picture-lover no greater pleasure could be given than the restoration of the glories of his old favorites. The removal of old and hard varnish, which is often the first process in cleaning a picture, requires no little knack and discernment to know when the friction applied to the surface has penetrated through this covering, the friction being caused by a continual rubbing of the varnish to and fro with the ends of the fingers until it is broken up into a fine powder. The beginner will find that this becomes, after a while, a painful operation, as the flesh gets extremely sore, and it is only practice and time which will render the skin of the fingers sufficiently hard to follow the operation with im-

punity. No other method which can be safely depended upon is known, although there are expedients which are resorted to by some persons, at the imminent risk of the work under their charge. The great aim of the cleaner ought to be to watch with the greatest care when he has penetrated the varnish and arrived at the painting itself, and the nearer he approaches it of course the greater ought to be his caution, lest he should apply the friction to the paint, which would be inevitably injured with so comparatively gritty a substance as pulverized varnish between the fingers. The dust must therefore be removed very often, and the parts from which it is removed examined, to see to what extent the process may be continued or otherwise.

If, however, the old varnish has not suffered from age, and it is the object merely to clean its surface, a little lukewarm water may be first applied with a sponge until the water ceases to be discolored. If then the varnish still presents an appearance of dirt, take a potato, and, cutting it in half, apply the fresh portion to the varnish, and, by a series of circles all over the surface, completely rub every part. Again apply the lukewarm water until it shows no taint of dirt. Should, however, the picture continue to exhibit traces of dirt, pass a sponge dipped in warm beer over it. Then, after it has become perfectly dry, wash it with a solution of the finest gum dragon dissolved in pure water.

Many pictures may come under inspection which have not been varnished. And here it may be mentioned that pictures should not be varnished for at least some months after they are painted, that the pigment may become thoroughly set and hard, and that before they are varnished the application of a potato, as before shown, should always be resorted to, to remove the exudations of the oils which rise to the surface, as well as the dirt collected, and this simple process will be quite sufficient to clean nine out of ten modern works. Artists will also find the use of the potato most valuable before commencing the progressive steps of their work, as it gets rid of that annoying greasiness which causes the newly applied and wet paint to run, after the manner of water upon a tea-tray. It ought to be remarked that the cleaning of a picture which has been varnished and one that has not undergone that process are two different things. Liberties may be taken with the former which would prove fatal to a picture not thus protected. In either case, as a preliminary experiment, the potato may be applied without fear of injury, provided that the moisture left by its juice is removed from the unvarnished picture.

Many finished oil paintings collect upon their surface what is termed "bloom," which in many instances entirely obscures the beauty of the work, and several receipts have been given for its removal; but all of these, or nearly all, are only temporary cures, the bloom returning sometimes with greater depth and opacity. Here, again, the potato is said to be the best remedy, if not an entire cure. Apply it as before, wash off with clean cold water, and then wipe the surface of the picture with a little sweet or nut oil with a silk handkerchief until perfectly dry.

Should, however, the painting require repairing as well as cleansing, from decay or defects in the material it is painted upon, then it may be found necessary to transfer the entire work to a completely new canvas, an undertaking which, at the first blush, would seem surrounded with almost insuperable difficulties, if not totally impossible. But if the following directions are closely followed it will be seen with what certainty and facility a feat so apparently formidable can be accomplished.

We will suppose we have a picture with its linen back perfectly rotten or worm-eaten, and almost too tender to touch, and, added to this, the work of the master is likewise covered with cracks, and otherwise is as bad a case as can be. First clean this decayed picture with more than usual care, for fear of breaking through the canvas, which would involve a more tedious process of restitution. Then with a sharp knife cut all around between the stretcher or frame and the canvas, and put the former aside; then spread the work with its face downward upon a smooth drawing-board or table; the back is now uppermost; then well moisten it with boiling water; this will shortly soften the canvas. Now turn the picture over with the subject uppermost, stretch it out and fasten it with drawing pins all round its edges to the board. Have ready a pot of strong glue, very hot and liquid, and spread the glue rapidly and equally over it. Now take a cloth which more than covers the

picture all round by two or more inches, spread it over the picture and glue, fasten it down to the table as before, and place the whole in the sun or open air to dry as soon as possible. When it is dried, it is to be detached from the board, and nailed down with the back of the painting uppermost. A little raised border of wax is made all round the edges, and the board being placed exactly level, a mixture of nitric acid and water is poured upon it. If this mixture be too strong, it will burn the painting; care must therefore be taken to prevent this by dipping your finger in the mixture before it is used. If your finger turns yellow immediately, it is a sign that the mixture is too strong and must be weakened. This mixture remains upon the canvas until the texture is quite destroyed and the threads eaten or rotted thoroughly, which can be easily ascertained either by the eye or the touch. The liquor is then poured off, and the threads of the canvas are easily taken off with a bone or ivory palette knife or other instrument, not of metal. The crust of the painting will then be found intact, glued with its face downward to the linen cloth before mentioned. The crust is then to be washed and cleaned with pure water, afterward wiped with a soft sponge, and left to stand until quite dry. It is then in its turn to be covered with glue wherein a little brandy should be mixed to make it stronger. Upon this glue a new canvas is to be immediately spread quite smoothly and well pressed, so that it may stick on every part. The best way of pressing it is with plates of lead or slabs of polished marble, care being taken to wipe the new canvas from time to time to prevent its sticking to the plates by means of the glue which oozes through the interstices of the fabric. All that now remains to be done is to take away the linen cloth and the glue which covers the face of the painting. As soon, therefore, as the last glueing is dry, the whole is to be detached from the board, and the linen cloth turned up; by moistening it with the mixture of nitric acid and common water its texture will soon be destroyed and it may be taken away, and then the glue may be easily dissolved by means of hot water. Thus is the painting transferred entire and perfect to a new canvas, which, in its turn, can be stretched upon a proper frame.

The proper tool for stretching canvas upon frames has two broad nippers with teeth-like grooves to hold the canvas, and a fulcrum at one side by which the leverage obtained may be very powerful. It is therefore necessary to be careful in the re-stretching of old pictures not to put too much strain on the canvas, or cracks may be made. The picture, is, however, generally in a sufficiently pliable state, immediately after the process before detailed, to prevent its cracking. Still, discretion must be exercised, and should the canvas "bag" after being nailed to the stretcher, the application of some weak fluid size to the back of the canvas will, as it dries, produce the tightness desired.

When paintings are upon wood, or panel, as it is termed, the wood must be pared till it is very thin, and the mixture of nitric acid and common water being poured upon what remains, will soon disintegrate the fibre of the wood, and render its removal perfectly facile. The same process should be followed as with canvas, only the picture at completion is attached with glue under pressure to the new wood.

#### ART IN PROVIDENCE.

##### ESTABLISHMENT OF AN ART CLUB—CHANGES IN THE SCHOOL OF DESIGN.

PROVIDENCE, R. I., March 8, 1880.

In a previous letter I stated that the artists were agitating the subject of an art club. Well, a club is founded and called the "Providence," as are all things hereabouts not dubbed "What cheer?" Does it not sound modestly beside "St. Botolph" and "The Century?" But, never mind, if it can but "provide" food for the æsthetically hungry. Two weeks ago some eight or ten artists composed the club; now it has about forty members with fair promise of many more, as soon as the initiation fee and the preliminary steps toward admission are quite settled upon. Of course we must trust to Providence for support, though many of the citizens cannot yet obtain a clear view of prospective advantages to accrue to them by connecting themselves with such an organization; and, indeed, it is an exceeding difficult task to inform them, for one must confess that for some time, at least, the advantages are all to the artist element.

There are citizens—good, kindly, upright persons—who solemnly say, when addressed upon this subject, that, as for "helping" the artists, they do not believe in it. "What an incentive to great work poverty is! And we were not helped when we set up in cotton!" The exclamations bear the flavor of unimpeachable respectability. "And as for spending money on exhibitions, receptions, and other club expenses, it is not only foolish, but fearfully wicked when said money might aid the discovery of a perfect potato-bug poison!" Of course this sounds absurd, but it is the substance of veritable expressions. Do not forget that this is a civilized and cultured community!

When the R. I. School of Design began it wholly ignored the local artists. Indeed, when Mr. Barry first came to the city he was told that there were no artists here. Last Tuesday evening a reception was given at the rooms of the school. The artists were invited. After all it seems to be true that institutions as well as individuals may grow wiser as well as older. A pleasant company gathered, and, after addresses by President Farnsworth, Mr. Fay of the Legislature, and Mr. Krauz, an excellent designer (who, by the way, made a most sensible and fitting speech in interesting Anglo-German), the company were invited to partake of a generous collation.

A change has taken place in the school. Chas. A. Barry—an able, earnest, and efficient man—has been forced to resign his position. Mr. Porter, who was his assistant, is now the head master instead. A life-portrait class has been added to the course, and an art-library and school-museum begun. That the school under the new mastership is conducted in a broader, more enthusiastic, and more cordial manner is alleged. Vast prospects for school improvement and up-building are aired, but they will never be realized unless the treasury is replenished soon. It is strange that capitalists and manufacturers are so blind. They appear to believe that art schools, as well as artists, can live on dreams. But let us look ahead.

HJALMAR STURLESON.

#### BOSTON CORRESPONDENCE.

##### THE MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS—INNESS AND COLEMAN—NOTES.

BOSTON, March 13, 1880.

THE rich, high-colored façade of the Museum of Fine Arts, with its ornate, broad entablatures of red terracotta, has been secured against the juxtaposition of any thing out of keeping (and any thing would have been out of keeping with its unique beauty), by the purchase of a little "flat-iron" of land hitherto liable to be built upon by private owners. This is not the only sign of the prosperity of the museum, and the prominence of its position among the institutions of Boston. The annual report of the trustees, just out, argues that its popular attractiveness and use as an educator are amply shown in the fact that nearly 160,000 persons have visited it during the past twelve months, and that on one Sunday during the exhibition of Mr. Hunt's pictures there were no less than 4400 in attendance. It is important to note, however, that seven-eighths of this attendance came in on the free days—namely, Saturday and Sunday. Only 20,000 of the 160,000 visitors, it would seem, were ready to spend twenty-five cents on art. The receipts from all sources are, it is stated, sufficient to pay only about one third of the current expenses of the museum. But it is doubtful if the receipts of any museum of art could, or should, be made to pay its expenses. The endowment must be able to bear the cost for the public benefit, and in supplying the endowment the public pays for what it gets. In this case the public pecuniary support extended to the museum has been generous, even lavish, though not in the way of quarters at the door. The whole receipts of the year amount to a little less than \$5000. But when subscriptions were called for to complete the wing last added, \$120,000 were poured into the laps of the trustees in less than a week—or \$40,000 more than was needed.

Strange to say, with this generous fund for building, the amount applicable to purchases of pictures is but \$500 a year, derived from what is known as the Everett Artist Fund. It has always been the criticism on the administration of the museum that it has spent too much on the building and not enough on what is to go into it. But by this policy a casket fit for the treasures